

# USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN THE HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

Survey Results on How Small-to-Medium  
Sized Enterprises in HRM are Using  
Information Technology

# Technology Survey

## About the Survey

Nicom IT Solutions' IT survey of Small-to-Medium Sized Enterprises is the first for the company, and the first for the Halifax Regional Municipality. Nicom asked a number of companies questions about their operating systems, hardware, and company practices. Since technology plays such a large role in daily activities, Nicom wanted to know more about how businesses, specifically smaller ones, are using tools that are typically employed by large organizations. This report includes the results of the questions posed in the survey as well as our reaction, and suggestions for those that may not be "keeping up."

## Technology has the Reputation of Being Expensive

Technology is a tool that should help you operate more effectively, efficiently, and increase your productivity. Technology is only expensive if it is not fulfilling business needs or is deployed improperly.

Nicom IT Solutions Inc., a full service information technology (IT) company, has been

in business for over twenty-five years. During this time we have had the opportunity to study, comprehend, and implement advancements in technology and observe how they have benefitted businesses such as yours. We

**COMPUTING IS NOT ABOUT COMPUTERS ANY MORE. IT IS ABOUT LIVING.**  
 ~NICHOLAS NEGROPONTE

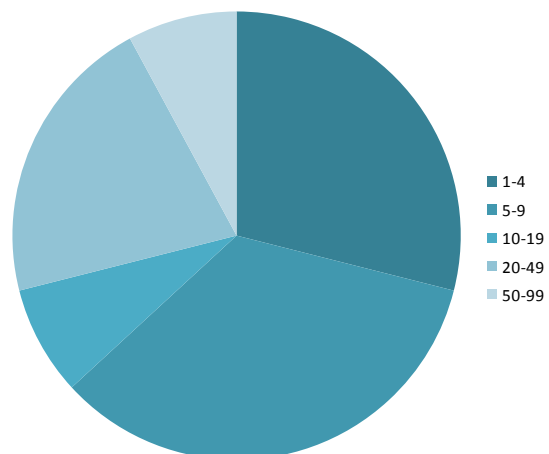
wanted to understand the technology trends for small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

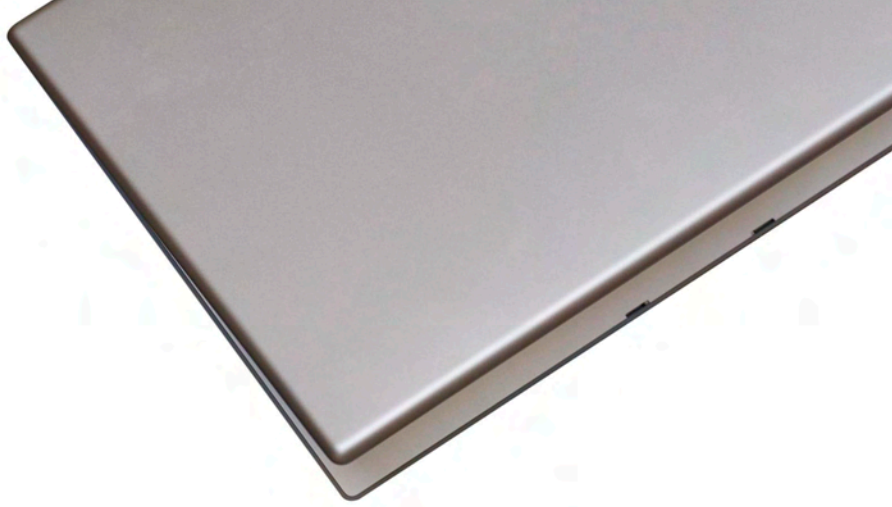
The results of our survey provide you with the ability to compare your technological status to others in HRM, and allows us to evaluate how we can best meet your needs.

### Are you keeping up?

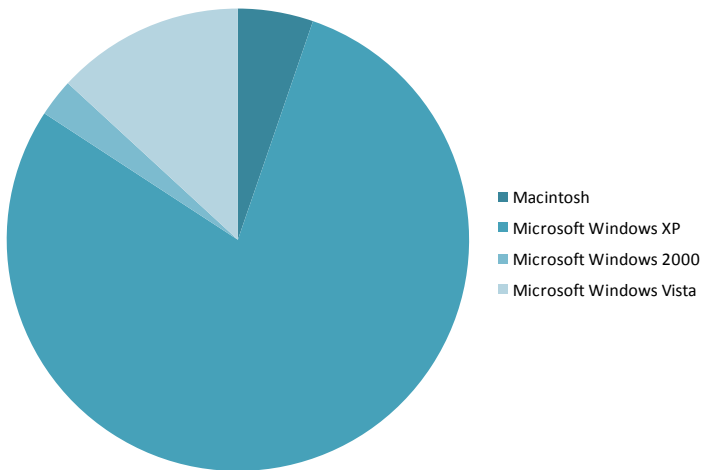
Most SMEs have more than one computer for office use. The majority of the respondents to Nicom's survey have as many as nine computers (34%). In order to be successful in these times, most businesses need some form of computer hardware and software to survive and compete.

### How many desktop/laptop computers does your office use?



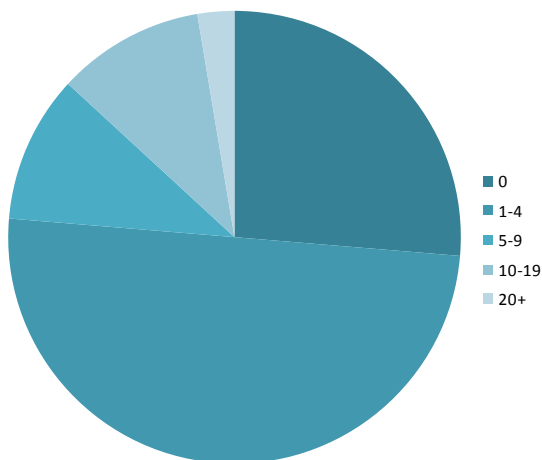


## What operating system software is being used on your desktop computer?



*Most respondents have a Microsoft operating system, split amongst Microsoft Windows XP, Microsoft Windows 2000, and Microsoft Windows Vista.*

## How many servers does your office use?



As many as half of respondents have at least one server, while a quarter of the respondents report not having one. A server is a specialized computer that provides information to other computers in your workplace through a “network”. There are many different types of servers with varying tasks. For example, a mail server stores email accounts, and sends and receives messages. A file server stores documents that can be accessed by other computers in the network. A web server allows Internet sites to be displayed on connected computers. These are a few common examples, several other types exist.

**NEVER TRUST A COMPUTER YOU CAN'T LIFT.**  
~STAN MASOR

Just about any computer can be used as a server if the necessary software is installed. While servers generally do not need a lot of processing power, adequate memory and fast hard drives are helpful for dealing with work loads.

*Ten percent of respondents are using Linux and UNIX as their server software. Microsoft products are most popular with respondents, having several versions installed on their servers, i.e., Microsoft Windows 2003 (25%), Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 (20%), Microsoft Windows 2000 (5%), Microsoft Small Business Server 2000 (5%), and, Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 (5%). Twenty-nine percent use server software not named on the survey.*

## Do you use wireless in your office?

With the technological progress made over the last number of years, wireless connectivity is not uncommon and is often expected. Wireless networking is most



commonly used to connect laptops, and can be beneficial for:

- spanning distances without cables,
- avoiding physical structures,
- providing backup communications abilities in case of network failure,
- linking portable or temporary workstations, and,
- remotely connecting mobile users or networks

Almost three-quarters of the survey respondents make use of wireless technology in their office.

## Do you have a Disaster Recovery Plan?

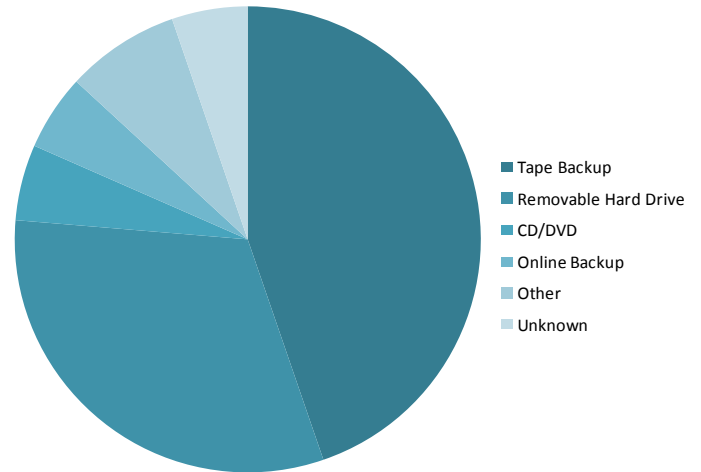
Having a Disaster Recovery Plan will allow an organization to survive and remain active during a catastrophe. The process involves identifying weaknesses in your computer network and taking measures to avoid harm. The goal of a Plan is preparedness. This will minimize the chances and effects of a potential disaster. The majority of survey respondents have a Disaster Recovery Plan.

**THE ULTIMATE METRIC THAT I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE FOR USER FRIENDLINESS IS QUITE SIMPLE: IF THIS SYSTEM WAS A PERSON, HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE BEFORE YOU PUNCHED IT IN THE NOSE?**

~TOM CAREY

## How does your organization backup data?

One topic that must be addressed in the Plan is the recovery of files and data. Nearly half of survey respondents use tape backup as a means of duplicating information for storage. Almost one-third use removable hard drives.



## Do you use Anti-Spyware Software?

Spyware is computer software that negatively affects hardware and applications. Spyware can monitor computer and Internet activity, collect personal information, and interfere with functionality. Running anti-spyware is recognized as a best practice for Microsoft Windows desktop computers. The US Federal Trade Commission and the technology industry have collaborated to create a site that lists “do’s” and “don’ts” to lower the risk of spyware infection and steps to protect your computers at <http://www.onguardonline.gov/>. The vast majority of survey respondents have anti-Spyware software running on their business computers. For those that do not, we would strongly suggest investing in an anti-spyware product.

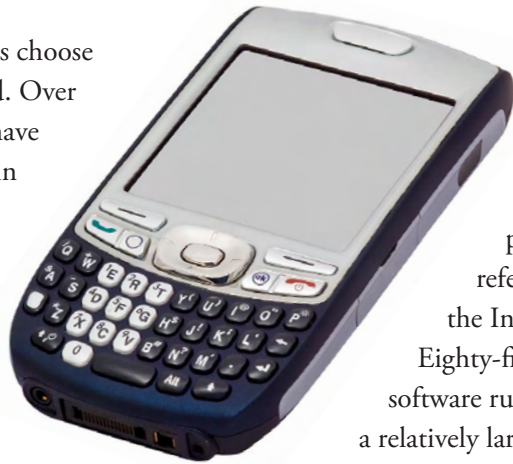
## Do you have custom developed software?

Using the proper computer software can make business processes more efficient, eliminate the calculation of complex figures, produce information in a format which helps in decision making, and save monetary expenditures in the long run. Software available in the market may not always suit all business requirements,

and quite often owners and managers choose to have something custom developed. Over sixty percent of survey respondents have some custom software that they use in their office.

## What mobile devices do you use?

Mobile devices, or handheld devices, are mini computers in themselves. They include a screen with keyboard, and are often beneficial when travelling, and in environments where carrying a large machine is impractical. The Blackberry was the most widely used device by respondents, by far, followed by the Notebook computer.



## Do you use Anti-Spam software?

Along with its ease of use and quick response time, the Internet does present opportunity for frustration. Spam refers to unsolicited messages sent over the Internet, in bulk, to multiple recipients. Eighty-five percent of respondents have anti-Spam software running on their computers. Interestingly, a relatively large number of respondents use **email marketing** in their business development strategy.

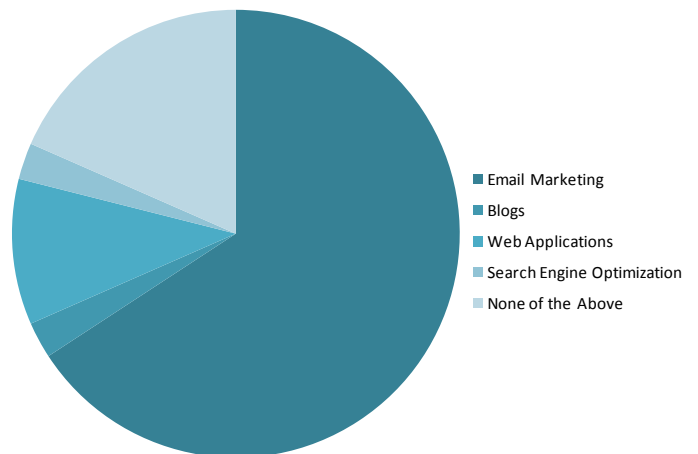
Please check all of the following that apply to your organization's marketing / Business development strategy.

## Can you access your office computer through the internet?

Remote access enables users to connect to their office computer systems via the Internet so they can work when outside the office and afterhours, providing flexibility. Over sixty percent of respondents can access their computer office systems through the Internet.

## Which email program do you use?

Where the Internet has exploded in its popularity, almost everyone uses it to search topics of interest, and has an email address. Microsoft Outlook, amongst respondents, is, by far, the email program of choice. Free web-based programs (such as, Gmail, Hotmail and Yahoo), Outlook Express, and Groupwise, were each used by a relatively small number of respondents.



Nicom IT Solutions Inc. was impressed with our findings.

We found that the great majority of respondents use similar devices and software, and have taken security



into consideration. The majority has kept up-to-date with wireless connectivity and has a Disaster Recovery Plan—very commendable.

Our survey also uncovered that the respondents see value in investing in Information Technology. Sixty percent plan to spend the same amount as last year and twenty-five percent plan to spend more.

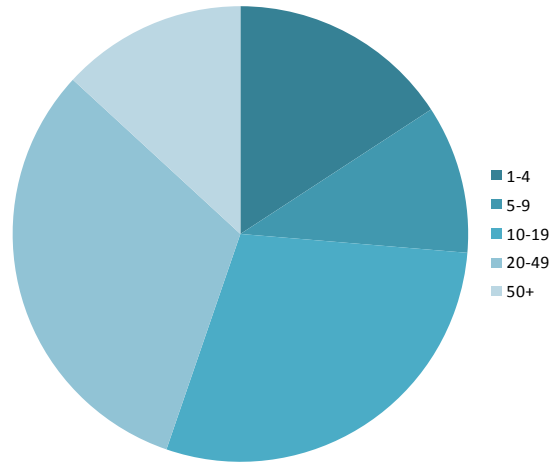
We were somewhat surprised that none of the respondents to Nicom's survey have e-commerce as part of their marketing / business development strategy. With such large growth in using the Internet to complete transactions there is the risk of losing sales. The benefits, as determined by the Canadian e-Business Initiative's "Net Impact Study Canada" (September 2004), for SMEs include an increase in revenues of 7%, as well as decrease in costs of 9.5%, and sales and administrative expenses of 7.5%.

**THE QUESTION OF WHETHER COMPUTERS CAN THINK IS JUST LIKE THE QUESTION OF WHETHER SUBMARINES CAN SWIM**

~EDSGER W. DIJKSTRA

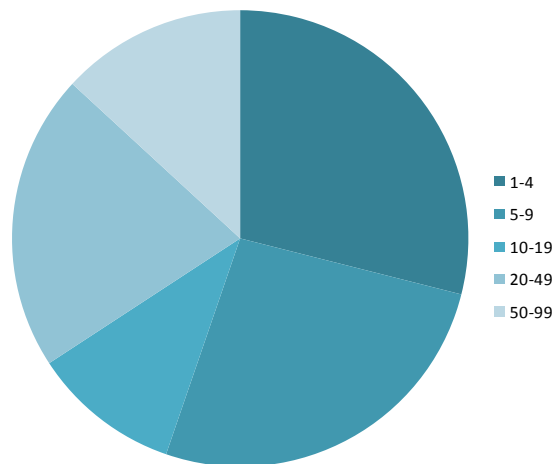
## How many years has your organization been in business?

Nicom IT Solutions Inc. distributed the survey to SME's in HRM in December 2008. Over sixty percent of respondent organizations have been in business between 10 and 49 years, with 32% in existence between 20 and 49 years.



## How many employees does your office have?

Fifty-five percent of respondent organizations have between one and nine employees, with 29% being smaller with one to four staff members.



## Nicom is a Full Service IT Professional Services Firm.

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- Technical Support
- Web Design & Development
- Placement Services

Nicom IT Solutions has been providing professional and innovative IT services for over 25 years. Based on our methodologies, unbiased advice, and business systems focus, our goal is to fully satisfy clients' objectives.



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